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Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the ninth and tenth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 26 February 2007, and in Madrid on 10 and 11 September 2007, respectively. The report is submitted for information. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under relevant agenda items.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The main objectives of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), established in September 2002,[1] are to promote coordination among the statistical programmes of international organizations, to provide coordinated outputs for the treatment of statistical issues in intergovernmental meetings, including the United Nations Statistical Commission, to foster good practices in the structuring and programming of statistical activities in international organizations and, ultimately to achieve an integrated system for data collection through the coordination of activities.

2. In 2007, CCSA chaired by the International Labour Organization, held two sessions: its ninth in New York on 26 February, and its tenth in Madrid on 10 and 11 September 2007. A complete list of the agencies that participated in both sessions is set out in the annex to the present report.

II. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Statistical training for staff of international agencies

3. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has continued its work on the implementation of the action plan on training of statisticians in international organizations. The IMF website, which provides information on training programmes in international agencies and on training material, was developed and is currently hosted by the United Nations Statistics Division. Progress in the development of e-training programmes was also reviewed. There have been a number of promising initiatives, including: the internal IMF e-training programme; the World Bank's e-learning course on the management of statistical development projects (currently under development); the Development Gateway Foundation's Virtual Statistical System; and two e-courses in statistics that were developed by Statistics Canada and Statistics Finland, respectively.

B. Costs and benefits of the adoption of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange

4. At its ninth session, the Committee adopted Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) as the standard for data and metadata exchange and requested the sponsors to further examine the implications in terms of both resources needed and benefits for the countries and international agencies that decide to implement it. The cost-benefit assessment, based on countries' and agencies' experience was prepared and presented to the Committee at its tenth session. The assessment covered the benefits that would accrue to countries and international agencies that adopted SDMX and the costs associated with its implementation, mainly for technology development and work on the subject-matter domains. The results of the

[1] The Committee was established to continue to carry out the functions previously performed by the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities, a subsidiary body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

assessment indicated that costs for the implementation would be minor, but that most developing countries would need assistance to build up their capacity before adopting the standards.

5. The Committee agreed that SDMX would be put forward to the United Nations Statistical Commission for its consideration, presenting it as a standard that has been adopted by the Committee and stressing the importance of assisting developing countries in building up their capacity in order to adopt those standards.

C. Work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goals Indicators on the implementation of Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6

6. The Committee reviewed progress made by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goals Indicators in implementing the recommendations made by the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goals Indicators and the ones contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 on statistical capacity-building. In particular, the Statistics Division presented to the Committee a note outlining the work done by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group to improve the compilation of indicators and countries' reporting, and to strengthen the coordination of capacity-building activities in order to assist countries in the production of the necessary data. The Committee commended the work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group and expressed appreciation for the initiative of including a large number of countries in the process.

7. The Committee urged all CCSA agencies that are members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, within the context of their mandates and resource availability, to comply with the recommendations made by the Friends of the Chair in their report and those contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6. The Committee also urged its members responsible for the compilation of Millennium Development Goals indicators to comply with the Principles for statistical activities in international organizations.

D. Data imputations by international agencies

8. As a follow-up to the recommendation by the Committee that agencies comply with the recommendations made by the Friends of the Chair in their report and those contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) conducted a review of issues and concerns related to the use of imputations of missing national values in international data series. In particular, Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 calls for avoiding imputation unless specific country data are available for reliable imputations following consultations with concerned countries and through transparent methodologies.

9. The Committee reviewed and discussed the proposals put forward in the paper on how to implement Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 and agreed on the following: (a) the issue of imputation of country data should be included in the quality assurance framework for international statistics; (b) imputations should be clearly flagged out in the database; (c) full transparency of the process and methods

of estimation should be ensured; (d) consultations with national statistical authorities should always be carried out and seen as part of the process to ensure transparency; and (e) the existing CCSA task team on international quality assurance frameworks will review ways to integrate these issues into the frameworks.

E. Use of population estimates

10. As part of the work on the improvement of the quality of data in international sources and increased transparency of methods used by international agencies, the Committee also reviewed issues related to the use of population figures. At its tenth session, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific submitted a note to the Committee on concerns related to the use of population estimates and on the possible underlying reasons for discrepancies among different sets of data used by agencies, which are due in general to the original sources of information and definitions used.

11. The Committee agreed that the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat should engage in more extensive consultations with countries and established a task team with the following mandate: (a) to review and recommend ways to improve consultations with countries that are in the process of producing national estimates; (b) to indicate to agencies how to factor in changes in the population figures from one revision to the next; and (c) to discuss ways to address the concern that there are no internationally agreed standards for annual population statistics.

F. Modalities of data sharing among international organizations

12. On the basis of a report prepared by ECE, the Committee discussed modalities of data sharing among international organizations and related current limitations and problems. The Committee agreed that currently, the exchange of data among agencies is working relatively well. However, recognizing that some issues and limitations still existed, especially in connection with the extent to which data provided by a partner agency can then be reused in other statistical outputs, it was agreed that ECE, in consultation with the World Bank and the European Central Bank, would prepare a paper, to be discussed by CCSA in 2008, that would outline good practices for data exchange among international agencies.

G. Special session on the implementation of quality assurance frameworks

13. In conjunction with its tenth session, CCSA held a special session on implementation of quality assurance frameworks. The objective of the quality assurance frameworks (or frameworks for statistics production) is to establish, in a specific statistical organization, a system of coordinated methods and tools that guarantee adherence to minimum requirements concerning statistical processes and products. Some member agencies presented their initiatives in applying the guidelines prepared by the task team on quality assurance. The Committee agreed

that the Statistics Division should host a web page for the exchange of information on peer reviews that would provide links to the agencies' sites.

14. The Committee agreed to fully endorse the quality guidelines prepared by Eurostat to facilitate the implementation of quality assurance frameworks in international organizations. The frameworks will contribute to the effective compliance by international organizations with the CCSA Principles, thus enhancing the credibility of international statistics.

15. In connection with the implementation of the quality assurance frameworks, the Committee also discussed plans for the next Conference on Data Quality for International Agencies, to be held in Rome in July 2008, immediately after the corresponding Eurostat conference for national statistical offices.

H. Coordination of technical cooperation activities

16. At its tenth session, the Committee also held a special session on statistical capacity-building. At its eighth session, in 2006, the Committee had agreed to form four task teams to further the work on certain specific areas of interest and explore ways for CCSA members to improve the coordination and effectiveness of their initiatives. The teams are as follows:

(a) Task team 1: reporting mechanisms on statistical capacity-building activities, led by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21) (ECE, Eurostat, World Tourism Organization, World Bank, Pan-American Health Organization);

(b) Task team 2: capacity-building through regional training initiatives for national statisticians (and regional training centres), led by the United Nations Statistics Division (International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, PARIS21);

(c) Task team 3: review of modalities for the coordination of technical cooperation programmes at the subregional level, led by the World Bank (United Nations Statistics Division, Eurostat, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, African Development Bank, World Tourism Organization);

(d) Task team 4: assessment of the effectiveness of capacity-building activities in Africa, led by the United Nations Statistics Division (World Health Organization, PARIS21, World Bank, African Development Bank).

17. During the special session, the task teams presented the results of their first year of work. The work of task team 1 (convened by PARIS21) received appreciation. The Committee also noted that the work done so far was based largely on the PARIS21 light reporting mechanism and requested that the report for the February 2008 session of CCSA present the task team's progress with respect to all of its terms of reference. Task team 2 presented an inventory of training activities and centres. Given that activities by international agencies normally would be reported by task team 1 and that other regional initiatives would be covered by task team 3, the Committee agreed that this task team would focus only on training centres with a regional reach, including both regional centres and national centres that provide training to official statisticians from outside the country.

18. In connection with this agenda item, other agencies presented their initiatives for the development of training tools. In particular, the World Bank presented an update of its project for the development of an e-learning course on investing in statistical capacity. The course is intended for those who have responsibility for the management of statistical capacity-building activities in developing countries. Eurostat also introduced its "Guide to Statistics in EC Development Cooperation", which had been developed to provide support to European Commission staff in using statistics and indicators in their development programmes, identifying and designing activities for statistical capacity-building and in understanding statistics for policymaking.

19. Task team 3 reported that progress had not been made on agreeing on a set of recommendations for good practices in the design and management of technical cooperation programmes to be put forward for consideration by CCSA. The Committee agreed that task team 3 would prepare a brief report for the February 2008 session and a more extensive one for the September 2008 session.

20. Finally, task team 4 presented the results of the first phase of its work. The lead agency compiled a list of areas and related elements to monitor statistical capacity by both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The Committee agreed that the number of areas considered in the assessment was too large and that the focus should be on quantitative indicators only. The Committee agreed that the African Development Bank, given the work already being undertaken by it in this area, would take the lead, together with the Economic Commission for Africa, in continuing the work of this task team.

I. Review of the functions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

21. At its tenth session, the Committee reviewed its functions and ways of operating, on the basis of a note prepared by the chair, ILO, and the secretariat, the United Nations Statistics Division. The proposals to the Committee were organized in five areas as follows:

Membership and level of representation

22. The Committee discussed whether membership should be extended to any agency/organization with statistical activities, whether all members should have equal status and at what level the agency should be represented in the Committee. It was agreed that the current list of members should be maintained and that requests for new memberships could be assessed on the basis of the new terms of reference and objectives of CCSA, to be redrafted and approved later. Any member will be free to opt for an observer status. The Committee members further agreed and strongly encouraged, that the level of representation should be maintained at the level of Director.

Activities and meetings

23. The Committee reviewed issues related to the organization of its meetings and side events. It agreed that side events would have to be limited in number and would have to be organized by the relevant agencies with no assistance from the secretariat. On the presentation of items during the regular sessions, the Committee

agreed that there should be a clear distinction between items for discussion and items for information and that there should be no fixed time limit for the presentation and discussion. The Committee also agreed that in between sessions, the secretariat should remind members of their commitments to produce outputs and reports, as agreed at the CCSA meetings.

Decision mechanisms

24. The Committee agreed that consensus would be determined by the chair, as reported in the minutes of the meeting. A suggestion was also made to include a list of actions by members or task teams agreed on by the Committee at each session.

Reporting

25. The discussion focused on whether CCSA should report to other entities, such as the United Nations Statistical Commission or the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and on whether or not the Committee should have an identity as a body. There was agreement that CCSA should not be formally accountable to the Statistical Commission. However, it was agreed that CCSA should report back to the Commission to communicate important decisions and key issues and that its work and decisions should be recognized. It was also agreed that there was a need for the Committee to be more visible. In this respect, it was agreed that all members should give the chair special recognition at events organized by them.

Management and organization

26. The Committee reviewed and discussed the current way of operating of the chair and the secretariat and agreed on the proposal of a two-chair system. It further agreed that there would be no financial assistance to the secretariat, but that on an ad hoc basis the secretariat could seek the assistance of other members. The task teams will continue to operate as they currently do, and the outputs they produce will remain the property of the task team members only. Finally, the Committee agreed that the secretariat and the co-chairs would redraft the terms of reference, which would include both a mission statement and a vision statement. The draft will be circulated to the members for their written suggestions and corrections. The new terms of reference would then be adopted by the Committee at its session in February 2008.

J. Other issues

27. At its tenth session, the Committee was informed by OECD of the outcome of the second OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, during which participants had discussed ways to measure progress in societies.

28. The Committee considered the need to revise the current classification of statistical activities and agreed that the Statistics Division, assisted by the regional commissions and OECD, would propose a revised classification.

Annex

Participating agencies and offices

Ninth meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 26 February 2007)

United Nations entities, programmes and funds

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division

United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme/Human Development Report

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Population Fund

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

PAHO/World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Trade Organization

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Eurostat

Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

African Development Bank

Asian Development Bank

European Central Bank

PARIS21

Economic Community of West African States

Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics

Caribbean Community

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

Tenth Meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (Madrid, 10-11 September 2007)

United Nations entities, programmes and funds

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division

United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Population Fund

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

International Atomic Energy Agency

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Eurostat

Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

African Development Bank

European Central Bank

PARIS21

Bank for International Settlements